Individualism, Individualization & Democratization under Persistent Authoritarianism

Reflections from the Case Study of Student Activism in Cameroon

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Individualism, Individualization, Democratization, Persistent Authoritarianism, Cameroon, student movements

Abstract

This article discusses contemporaneous relationships between individualization and democratization using data from the case study of student activism in Cameroon. Classic sociological works demonstrate that democracy appeared with individualization, that is to say with the emergence of "individuals", corollary of the weakening of "traditional" modus operandi of community as a collective identity. In contrast, this article shows that individualization does not necessarily mean democratization. We show how student activism imply processes of individualization that are influenced by the socio-political context of authoritarian persistence and how they ultimately contribute to reshape it. The article starts by introducing the literature about relationships between individualism, individualization and democratization in general, in Africa and in Cameroon. Then it introduces the case study based on 70 life stories of Cameroonian student leaders of 2000's by comparing distance with primary socialization of their individual choices in terms of ethnicity and gender.

Introduction

This article aims to bring a contribution to the discussion about contemporaneous relationships between individualization and democratization using data from the case study of student activism in Cameroon. Classic literature in sociology states that individualism and individualization promote democracy. So, following this literature process of individualism and of individualization should foster democratization. Or analysis of my data calls that into question.

Studying dynamics of student activism in Cameroon is interesting for several reasons. In themselves, associations create new space of socialization, compared with primary socialization, since secondary socialization occurs within associations (among other spaces). Moreover, associations, by contributing to promote a diversity of opinions are often presented as reinforcing process of democratization. Student activism is also considered as a social force which can be at the forefront of liberation struggles.

Here I rely on 70 life stories chosen among a total of 85 collected with student leaders between 1990's and 2010's. I collected them between 2009 and 2014 for my PhD thesis during a cumulated amount of one year of fieldwork in the six first historical public universities in Cameroun: Yaoundé I, Yaoundé 2, Douala, Dschang, Buea, Douala and Ngaoundere (see document 1 and Morillas, 2015). I have more data about "the mother university", the Yaoundé 1 university. Indeed, it's the one with the highest student enrollment, with the most long-lasting student associations and it's also the oldest one created in 1962,

that is to say two years *after* the independence from France. The university was then called Federal University of Cameroon (FUC). The other five universities were created with the university reform of 1993. Since 1972, university archives show that the FUC was considered as a political tool and it's still the case despite the re-instauration of multipartism in December 1990 and the official speeches advocating democracy (Morillas 2018?), even if since then the will to control students took different forms, contributing to the authoritarian persistence (Zambo Belinga 2003).

I choose to use the concept of "authoritarian persistence" to qualify the Cameroonian political climate because it refers more to authoritarian modes of governance which affect relations between the state and the society, whatever is the categorisation of the regime by himself or observers. And it insists on the continuity of this governance with the colonial time and the single-party system period. Indeed, it "posits, in a legitimately admissible way, that despite the legal and institutional reorganization attesting to the partial openness of the regime and the transformation of the ways of governing, democratization has basically unfolded within the framework of a constant authoritarian ethos. Although repressed formally, this one, especially with regard to the management of the protest, does not completely break with the governance of the stick, a political paradigm based on the right to repress and the refusal to listen to governed people"[1].

Despite authoritarian persistence and despite a national context of depoliticization of social movements and collective demobilization (Pommerolle 2008), several student associations emerged in 2000's. Since the creation of the public university, I distinguish two main student organizations related to living and working conditions of students: autonomous and institutional ones. The student associations created by the power will be qualified as institutional (institutional student association, ISA for short) while those created under student initiative will be qualified as autonomous (ASA). Institutional activists tend to do compromise with the authorities, which allows them to hope in the long run to be co-opted by the authorities, where autonomous student leaders tend to try to negotiate with authorities in order to reach mutual agreements, knowing that student unions are not allowed as such[2].

By analysing the sociological profiles and choices of student activists within these two kinds of organizations, this articles sheds light on political socialization of student activism within these two kinds of association. We demonstrate that militant student commitments are partly explained by processes of individualization that are influenced by the socio-political context while ultimately helping to reshape it.

I will first analyse literature about relationships between individualism, individualization and democratization (1), then I will present processes of individualism (2) and of individualization (3) inside student associations and how they tend to contribute or no to democratization.

Map of the six first public universities ("universités d'État") in Cameroon

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[1] (I translate Manga and Mbassi 2017, 75; See also Zambo Belinga 2003)

[2] With one exception at Buea. In 1993, the decree creating the university of Buea, in the Anglophone part of Cameroon, provides for a student union. The University of Buea Student Union existed two times before being forbidden by academic authorities, from 1993 to 1995 and from 2005 to 2013.
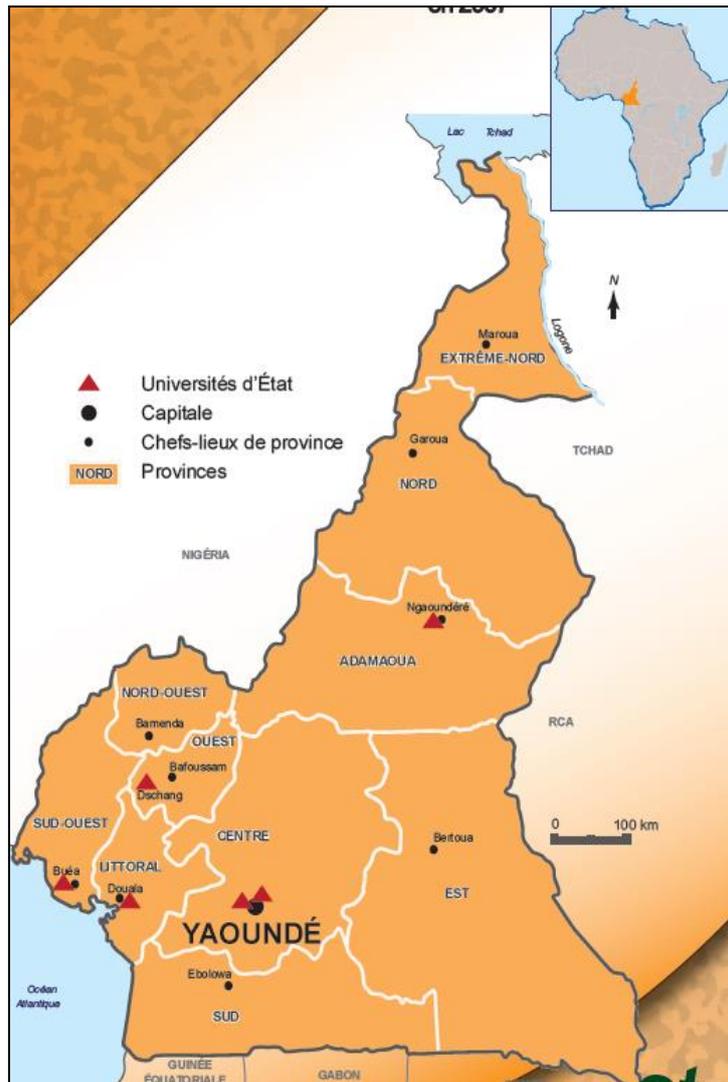
Conception: Cindy Morillas. Realisation: Marie-Louise Penin (UMR Passages, université de Bordeaux)

1. Literature about Relationships Between Individualism, Individualization and Democratization

After a brief presentation on our conception of democratization, we present main theories about relationships between individualism and democratization (1) and between individualization and democratization (2) in classic sociological works, in Africa and in Cameroon.

1.1 Democratization

In his sociohistorical analysis of student movements in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa, Pascal Bianchini shows that there are two opposing views, socio-political and institutional, regarding the definition of democratization: "To the thesis of a student avant-garde at the forefront of the struggles for democratization understood in a socio-political and not strictly institutional sense is opposed a more negative perception of these movements considering, more or less, that the unconventional action of the latter constitutes an obstacle to democratization in the sense of consolidating the institutions set up by the "democratic transition", or even to the unbiased exercise of "academic freedom"' (Bianchini 2014, 249).

For our part, we use a socio-political definition of democratization. Democratization refers to the strengthening of the procedures relating to the persuasion so, in other words, to the weakening of those relating to the force. In fact, democratization implies the establishment of democratic institutions and the unbiased exercise of the academic freedoms (Neave 1998).

1.2 Individualism

"As Alexis de Tocqueville put it quite matter-of-factly, "individualism is of democratic origin" (II, 98)" (Ham 2000). In Africa, Alain Marie and Robert Vuarin argue that any society distinguishes the individual as a universal empirical reality and implements mechanisms of individual differentiation. Thus, in traditional societies, this process of individuation allows the emergence of figures indispensable to community cohesion. This is the case of the sorcerer who embodies "the individualist, determined to pursue his particular goals, to satisfy his selfish inclinations, to obey his irrepressible impulses of aggression" (Marie and Vuarin 1997, 65).

Since this collective work directed by Alain Marie and Robert Vuarin about individuals in Africa, which was pioneering in Francophone African studies, other works adopted a methodological approach that is more a matter of methodological individualism than of holism. The analysis of these processes has two major issues, the theoretical one of overcoming the binary categorial opposition between "individual" and "society" and the epistemological one of provincialization of the study of individualism in order to "trivialize" this object in the field of African studies, at least Francophone ones. In other words, it is a question of promoting in the field of African studies the consideration of the individual scale, and therefore the role of individuals, in the analysis of more general social and political phenomena.

1.3 Individualization

The sociological literature shows that individualization is correlated with the advent of Western modernity and that it would promote democracy. According to Céline Béraud: "Individualization refers to a long-term process of constructing the individual as a subject, a process that is linked to democracy and the market and on which classical authors have insisted (Tocqueville, Durkheim, Simmel). [...] The theories of individualization are articulated with a narrative of modernity. "Thought as an individual adventure partially unpredictable (love, fortune, health come and go), modernity places everyone in front of his responsibility as an individual having to build his trajectory. [...] Everyone is now able to think (if not to dream) his destiny: to enter the orders? to go to the colonies? to migrate to the city? to marry?" (Le Bart 2008, 111). In the last few decades, the process of individualization would have been an acceleration or even a form of fulfillment (the second phase of modernity, indicated by various expressions). Freed from collective shackles and statutory assignments, we would now be subject to the social injunction of "being oneself," an authentic and singular "self"" (Béraud 2012).

Christian Le Bart also puts forward the idea that individualization refers to a free choice of community identity assignments to which democracy is bound: "Democracy is analysed as recognition of the individual judged capable of deciding in his soul and conscience what is good for society. His judgment is enlightened, there are in him the resources necessary for the exercise of a free and relevant choice. He is independent." (Le Bart 2008, 89).

Analysing city dwellers in Ivory Coast, in a context of "blockage of clientelist and community redistribution", Marie shows that the debt logic continues with more individualist strategies

concerning redistribution of wealth "as a means of adjusting and reconsidering solidarity" (Marie 2000, 147, 148). For him "Little wonder in these circumstances that African societies are permeated by a drive toward individualization (existential itineraries and subjectivities) that suggests rising individualism" (*idem*). But, by analysing individual, collective and political choices of student activists, especially those in a particular kind of student association (institutional ones), we'll see that individualism doesn't so automatically imply democratization.

But this individualization isn't "progressive" as Marie points it: "This *progressive* individualization (privatization of practices, strategies and aspirations, growing independence, a devil-may-care view of community establishments, a major struggle to survive and to protect or promote personal interests to the detriment of solidarity) marks the four main fields of everyday life" (*idem*, I underline). Individual and collective struggles against slavery (moreover by individuals not considered by foreigners as "human beings"), against colonization, against apartheid, and then against postcolonial features of African societies (J.-A. Mbembe 2013) – and their counterpart in the rest of the world – show that individuals are engaged in process of individualization at least in Africa since two paroxysmal moments: in Africa the slave revolt led in 595 by Amador breaks out in Sao Tome and Principe and, outside Africa, the Haitian revolution initiated in August 1 791 by the Wood-Caiman ceremony of Maroons (Hurbon 2000). No doubt that precolonial societies also knew revolts which implied individualization process. Because revolts itself implies, but not necessarily for each of their participants, processes of individualization against assignments made by some of their identities (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, etc.).

Nevertheless, since the end of the 1980s there's a development of individualization processes concomitant to processes of political liberalization in Africa because there is more freedom, even if there are still important limitations for instance in terms of freedom of expression in the public space as it's the case in Cameroon (Manga and Mbassi 2017; Djimeli 2017; Morillas 2019?). Social ascension paths of the "social cadets", women and young people have taken a new impetus. New "figures of emancipation", both individual and collective, have emerged, like the internationalized "female African traders" (Bredeloup 2012), young *kossou-kossou* of Niamey (individual form of prostitution that differs from a traditional form related to the worship of Bori, karuwaï, Tiékoura 1997) and "*tuée tuée*" Gabonese (Tonda 2007).

In Cameroon, several authors note similar dynamics. This is the case of feymen (Malaquais 2001; Ndjio 2012), motorcycle taxi drivers (Amougou Mbarga 2010) and "entrepreneurial subjects" (Amougou 2016). Individualization is a concept that differs not only from that of individuation and individualism but also from that of subjectivation. But contrary to Amougou, we're not going to deal here with logics of subjectivation and desubjectivation (Amougou 2017). Indeed, the question of subjectivation/desubjectivation implies an analysis of the dual concept of subject, that is to say as production of subjectivity on one hand and as subjection on the other hand ("There are two meanings to the word 'subject': subject subjected to the other by control and dependence, and subject attached to one's own identity by consciousness or self-knowledge. In both cases, this word suggests a form of power that subjugates and subjugates." Foucault 2001). Thus, it also implies to analyze relationships with the ruling power. For the purpose of this article, we focus not on relation between academic authorities and student movement but on choices made at the meso level by student associations (2) and at the micro level by student activists in terms of militant career and political choice (3).

2. Individualism versus Democratization

In this party we will present autonomous and institutional student organizations in Cameroon (2.1) and then the repartition of level of recruitment inside these organizations which shows that individualism tend to have antidemocratic consequences (2.2).

2.1 Contemporaneous Autonomous and Institutional Student Activism (ASA and ISA) in Cameroon

Following the repression of the first student demonstrations in 1963, 1965, 1969, 1972, 1973, 1979-1981 (Morillas 2015), both the authorities and the students begin to organize under the same device: the student association. We distinguish the "institutional" student associations (ISA), initiated by university authorities, from those "autonomous" (ASA), which are by students. ISAs can be considered as a form of preemptive repression (Jaegher and Hoyer 2018) because they channel students to prevent their mobilization. It is besides following cycles of student mobilization that the first ASAs are set up. Institutional activists tend instead to compromise with the authorities, which allows them to hope in the long run to be co-opted by the authorities.

Student mobilizations between 1979 and 1981 led to the creation of faculty student associations by the highest authority of the state, the presidency of the republic, which shows the reluctance of the power vis-à-vis the student speech. Faculty student associations still exist and are the main ISA on campuses. Historically, two national institutional student associations have been created to try to channel students: the National Federation of Cameroonian Students (Fenec, 1963-1975) and the Mutual Solidarity of Cameroonian Students (Musec, 2009-2014). The first one, which was officially considered as a student union, was close to the power. The second one was supposed to deal with student conditions of living and health. There are few student activists who have never gone through an AEI, it's the case of only nine of the 70 activists I analysed life stories.

At least six autonomous student organizations are created by students in the mid-2000s, not at the national level but at the level of universities. Most of them will collapsed after a few months or years: The Collective of Cameroonian Students at the University of Dschang (1999-2004), the National Union of Pupils and Students of Cameroon at the University of Douala and the University of Dschang (2002-2004), the Cameroon Student Rights Association at Yaoundé I University (since 2004), SOS Student Solidarity at the University of Douala (in 2005), the University of Buea Students' Union at Buea University (from 2005 to 2013) as well as the collective Let's save Yaoundé II University (in June 2012).

As a biographical consequence of their militant career, those from AEA generally continue to campaign after the university in Cameroonian opposition parties, associations or, more cautiously, in their professional life, by experiencing obstacles to their social ascensions, or end up exiled. Indeed, their academic, socio-economic and / or political rise are disadvantaged by their militant activities because of the hostility of the authorities against them.

Autonomous and Institutional Student Associations
& Two Main Student Movements in Cameroon
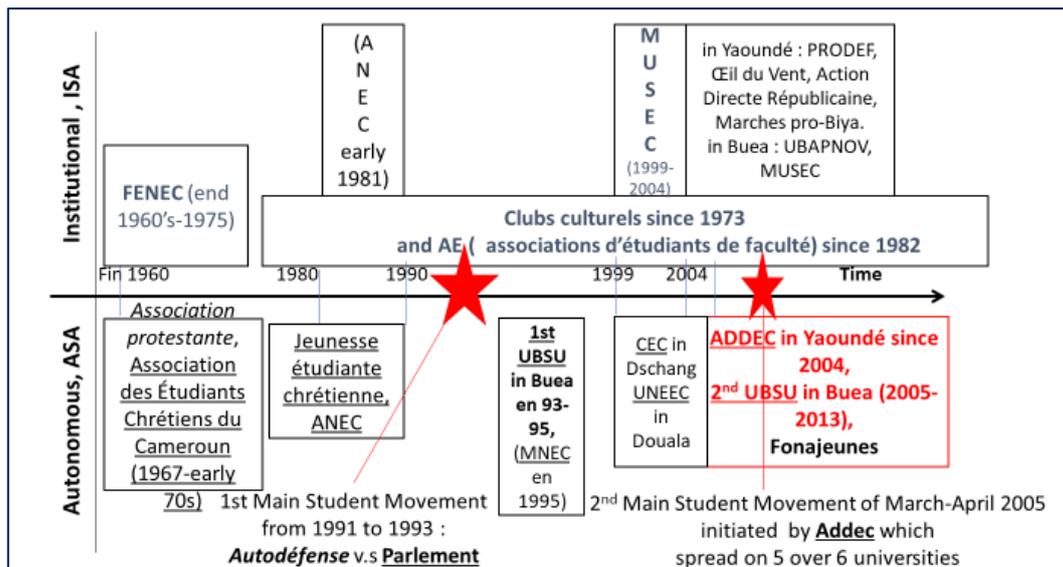
Underlined are autonomous student association who took positions considered "subversive" by the ruling power. Autodéfense is considered autonomous, relying on a life story with one of his leader, Mani Jean-Blaise (life story with him, 17 and 24 August 2011, Yaoundé)

2.2 Level of Recruitment in Institutional and Autonomous Student Organizations

Individualization is distinguished from individualism, "the will to always choose what maximizes the pleasure or the material interest of the individual", which can be summed up in the formula "Every man for himself" (Bréchon and Galland 2010, 16). The processes of individualization are part of the conditions for the possibility of student leadership in a situation of constraint. In other words, all student activists are engaged in individualistic and individualization processes that we will demonstrate through the analysis of the militant careers of students who show forms of frankness in relation to assignments related in particular to their class, ethnoregional identity, gender and their primary political socialization (Muxel 2001). Applied to militant commitments, and contrary to the notion of trajectory that suggests a teleological orientation life course (Passeron 1990), the concept of militant career makes it possible to restore the fineness of the courses often not "determined once and for all by the original position or the socialization" of individuals taking into account their objective (occupied social positions) and subjective (representations) dimensions, as pointed out by Everett Hughes (Agrikoliansky 2001, 30; Hughes 1971). It implies that individualization is part of a militant career.

The life stories collected suggest that student activists express a form of individualism when they make cost-benefit calculations in their choices between institutional and autonomous student association that maximize what is for them their main interest. Those of the AEI, numerically majority, give priority to their individual material success while those of AEA, numerically minority, favour collective success. It is explained, on the one hand, by a much more abundant associative offer (faculty student associations, cultural clubs, the local Musec and the former National Musec to quote the most recent institutional associations) but also, on the other hand, by the rational cost-benefit calculations of activists who lead them to privilege their short-term individual interests to the detriment of long-term collective interests, producing institutional activists. Indeed, AEI's loyal or converted leaders in the AEIs are finally able to benefit from privileges that allow them to progress socially within Cameroonian society. Many institutional activists view militant action as a strategic resource that provides access to the governing market and other tribunian functions.

On the contrary, the calculation of prioritizing long-term collective interests over short-term individual interests produces the less numerous autonomous activists. Indeed, they more often face attempts of deterrence from their relatives than activists in AEI. Nevertheless, in function of the conjuncture, they are able to mobilize thousands of students like, for instance during the national student strike of 2005.

Institutional militancy tends to favour what Durkheim calls "selfish individualism" which puts individual interests above collective ones. On the contrary, autonomous militancy tends to favour "moral individualism" by tending to prioritize collective interests despite costly biographical consequences ranging from marginalization to the use of exile through vexation (Mongeau 2011). So, individualism is a question of hierarchy of interest, both choices have their rationality, and so both are rational choices. What is at stake here is an opposition between two visions, each one having its coherence: interest on individual or collective privileges. Students preferentially involved, and thus are more numerous; in ISAs because it seems to bring more opportunities for personal purposes. Autonomous militancy is particularly constraining, although it constitutes a possible alternative to institutional militancy.

Similar processes of antidemocratic individualism exist in Occidental countries and the same result comes from literature about contribution of African middle classes to democratization. Indeed African middle classes tend to don't intervene politically in order to maintain their economic statute (Darbon and Toulabor 2014).

2.3 Political Socialization inside Institutional and Autonomous Student Organizations

It's not the fact that individual interest predominates collective ones which is antidemocratic in itself, it's their consequences in terms of political socialization. Braud defines socialization as "a mechanism at the end of which the constraints that men exert on other men are transformed, by internalization, into self-restraint" (Braud 2008, 344). In 1985, Mbembe devotes to students the second chapter of his book about youth and political order: "Educational Systems and Social Systems". It places particular emphasis on a socialization that is still relevant and that annihilates all critical thinking of students: "For the African powers, the student is the one who must be content to learn, to be trained, to be educated. He owes full allegiance to the State and must, as a result, participate in the security of its institutions by refraining from criticism" (J. A. Mbembe 1985, 53). Political socialization makes students internalized political norms and behaviours. Inside student association, this socialization occurs through interactions with authorities and with other students.

Inside institutional student association, political socialization tends to contribute to the authoritarian persistence. Student elections and daily routine of the life of associations implied structuring interactions with authorities. Student elections of ISA are not organized by student themselves. Rules and electoral committees are entirely composed by administrative authorities of the university. One ex-president of a faculty student association described pressures he faced to favour the candidacy of one student, different from the one he supported: "So I'm embarrassed, X is my tribal brother, Y is from the West but is more qualified [...]. Since I am among those who advocate legality I thought that logically Y would replace me. I assure you that it was at this moment that I suffered the greatest pressures of my associative life at the university [...]. The things I was following were disappointing because my fellow students, teachers, administrative staff, I believe in all the chains of the

administration of higher education, people very close to the minister, put pressure on me directly and indirectly by proxy to ask me to change my choice"[3].

In daily routine, leaders and authorities see faculty student association as an intermediary body, a "transmission belt" of decisions from university authorities to students. Within the university, institutional student activists assist both the authorities in the management of students (registration, information on the timetable, course content, etc.) that students in their complaints to the university authorities (problems of registration, display of results, etc.). During academic crises, the authorities appeal to these student leaders to urge them to convince other students to join their decisions and dissuade them from protesting. These same leaders see their academic, socio-economic and / or political ascents favoured by their militant activities thanks to the favoured measures and the invitations they receive to attend academic or political events. Institutional student leaders are asked to mobilize students during national holidays (February 10th Youth Day, Unit Day on May 20th), academic events (academic games) and political events (hosting political personalities). They are personally invited to conferences or ceremonies of the ruling party, the Cameroonian People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) which is for these activists the occasion of relations likely to promote their socio-economic and / or political promotion. After meeting a political figure in such an event, one institutional student leaders of Dschang started to be involved in fraudulent entry contest to "grandes écoles" (life story, Dschang)

Political socialization inside autonomous student association tend to challenge the authoritarian persistence by extending the political field of possibilities, both in terms of representations and practices. Autonomous student leaders are considered by the university authorities as protestors. Autonomous student activists first assist students with difficulties related to their living and learning conditions. We could observe the daily life of Addec, the main contemporaneous student association. Debate are organised at its office, office whose walls are covered with quotes and pictures from international and national activists, such as leaders of the nationalist party, Union of populations of Cameroon, UPC. Addec organises itself its elections. During academic crises, they try to negotiate mutual agreements when the authorities agree to meet them. They are more resistant to pressure than institutional student leaders, at the risk for instance of being expelled from all universities, which happened to the president of Addec in October 2014 for leading a campaign against rising university fees. In contrast, the worst sanction suffered by an institutional leader was the convocation to five disciplinary councils leading to the removal of his position as president of a faculty student association because he organized by himself a "march of peace and unity". Authorities perceived it as a contentious event.

3. Individualization and Democratization

Here we are going to look more closely at the sociology of student activism in Cameroon: Who comes to power and How? How does the constitution of the student leadership reflect, or not, more oppressive processes like authoritarianism and patriarchy?

3.1 Relationships to Ethnoregional Assignments

3.1.1 Leadership Student Organizations of 90's and 2000's

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[3] Life story of a faculty association president at Yaoundé 1 university, 20 August 2011, Yaoundé.

Student activism in Cameroon was strongly structured in the 1990s around the cleavage between the "Anglo-Bamileke" deemed close to the opposition and the "Beti" supposed to be close to power. This question of ethnicity is indeed a sensitive issue in Cameroon, which raises political issues much more markedly, for example, than factors related to gender or social origin. In this sub-section, we will study the ethnicity stated by the forty-three student activists and will discuss ways of instrumentalizing ethnicity by the authorities, on the one hand, and student activists on the other hand trying to take the precautions required to handle these concepts because this instrumentalization is a sensitive issue. We will then study the political preferences and political commitments of students and demonstrate that the link between ethnicity and political choice is not nearly as linear as the exacerbated cleavage of the 1990s suggests.

For Piet Konings, the political division between Parliament and Self-Defense intensifies "the simmering tensions between two groups of students: the "autochthonous" Beti students who tended to support the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) on the one hand, and the Anglophone and Bamileke "stranger" students who were more inclined to support the major opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), on the other" (Konings 2002, 181). For him, ethnicity explains the political ideology of individuals which explains in which association they participate. He then states that it leads to political violence and exclusion: "The growing polarization between these two groups of students, fuelled by the regime, ethnic entrepreneurs, and the press, gave rise to an explosion of violence and the emergence on campus of a Beti militia engaged in various forms of ethnic exclusion" (Konings 2002, 181).

Indeed, a majority of self-defense leaders are Beti while those in Parliament are Bamileke. To counter this image of Beti grouping, Self-Defense puts forward a Bamiléké student enrolled in the first year of economics, Ngoufack, who was interviewed by CRTV at the invitation of Gervais Mendo Ze (*Le Messager*, 15 May and 6 June 1991; *La Nouvelle Expression*, n° 9, 7 May 1991, p. 13). Ngoufack distinguished himself from the vigilance committee he claims to be led by Mani, that he said he heard telling "tribal" remarks and made his meetings in General Leclerc High School. Simultaneously, Ngoufack says he supports Mani's action against Parliament. He complains of being called a spy and plans to dissolve the Self-Defense to take another name (*Le Messager*, 6 June 1991). Shortly before they found the Parliament, Corantin Talla and Robert Waffo Wanto used this strategy, which is inversely for them to put forward a student Beti, for the elections of the Aefas.

Concerning Addec, we observe an ethnoregional diversity with, in the first office (2004-2006) a Bamileke president (Herrick Mouafo Djontu), a Beti general secretary (Jacques Messi Bala) and a Bamoun vice-president (Claude Linjuom Mbowou). The following offices will always include at least one Bamileke and one Beti respectively: Rodrigue Batogna Gnitchogna President and Alain Blaise Ngono Secretary General in 2006-2008, André Benang Interim President and Patrick Mvondo Essiga Secretary General in 2008-2010, Hervé Nzouabet President and Sapé Cyrille Secretary General in 2010-2012, Batoum Thierry President and Jean Nicaise Owono Vice President in 2012-2015.

Thus, we observe a shift in the composition of the leadership of the two main autonomous student organizations. Whereas it was fully composed of Bamileke in the Student Parliament of the 1990's, there's a balance between Beti and Bamileke student in the 2000's for Addec. So, at the meso level of student organizations, there's a distance with the claimed ethno-political cleavage in the country. What about the micro level of student activists?

3.1.2 Ethnicity and Political Preferences of Activists of 2000's and their Parents

The study of the relationships between ethnicity and political sensitivity of the activists in our sample who spoke on the subject (twenty-four of them) shows that no Beti student is a member of CPDM, Presby or OYCRDM (see Table 1). The eight students who express a preference for one or more of these organizations are of the following ethnicities: four Bamileke, one Kirdi and one Duala (information about ethnicity is missing for two of the activists). The two Betis who speak on the issue say they are not convinced by any of the political parties. The person close to the SDF is Bamileke. Activists of different ethnicities feel close to other opposition parties, including a Bamileke, as well as those not convinced by a party.

Table 1: Declared Ethnicity and Political Sensitivity of Activists

	CPDM ou Presby ou OYCPDM	SDF	Other opposition party	Not convinced	Total
Bamiléké	4	1	2	1	8
Béti				2	2
Kirdi	1				1
Ethnie du Nord-ouest				1	1
Bassa				5	5
Bamoun					0
Banen			1		1
Yambassa			1	1	2
Foulbé			1		1
Duala	1				1
Missing Information	2		1		3
Total	8	1	5	10	24

Source: Life stories

Half of the activists who have spoken on the issue are not only sensitive but are engaged in a political party. Students engaged in an organization close to the CPDM are three Bamileke, one Kirdi and one Duala (missing information about ethnicity for an activist, see Table 2). The Bamileke activist close to the SDF is very active. Two Bamileke, one Yambassa and one Foulbe are engaged in another opposition party.

Table 2: Declared ethnicity and political choice of activists

	CPDM ou Presby ou OYCPDM	SDF	Other opposition party	Total
Bamiléké	3	1	2	6
Béti				0

Kirdi	1			1
Ethnie du Nord-ouest				0
Bassa				0
Bamoun				0
Banen				0
Yambassa			1	1
Foulbé			1	1
Duala	1			1
Missing Information	1		1	2
Total	6	1	5	12

Source: Life stories

More generally, our sample invites us to question the thesis according to which the Beti are close to the power and the Bamileke close to the opposition. While none of the people in our sample said they were close to the opposition, several Bamileke people got involved in the CPDM.

3.1.3 Political Preferences of Activists of 2000's and their Parents

Student movements are frequently accused of being manipulated politically (Unesco 1993; Abbink and Kessel 2005). At the time of its creation in 2004 and during a national student strike it led in 2005, Addec was accused by authorities and the media of being manipulated by the opposition, just as the student Parliament had been at the beginning of the 1990s. But at a micro level, five autonomous activists in our sample prefer another opposition party than the Social Democratic Front. Each of them named opposition parties which differs from the others (see Table 3), which testifies to the break-up of the Cameroonian opposition, regularly criticized in the speeches of activists who are not convinced by any political party and in media. These five other opposition parties preferred by activists are: the Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon (MRC) of Maurice Kamto, the National Manifesto for the establishment of democracy (Manidem) of Anicet Ekane, the Cameroon People's Movement for the Modernity of Cameroon (RDMC) of Milla Assouté and the Union of Populations of Cameroon (UPC). And at a meso level, it is only very gradually that the Addec begins to assume positions and demands directly concerning the Cameroonian political sphere, especially since the riots of February 2008, in collaboration with several youth organizations.

What do the data from our life stories tell us about the relationship of student activists with politics? Twenty-two activists in the sample agreed to answer our questions about the sensitive subject of their political preferences and eighteen about those of their parents (see Table 1). The ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) is the one most often named. Twelve respondents say that their father prefers CPDM, six say it is also the case of their mother and eight say it is also their own case, knowing that cases overlap. Then come the absence of preference with four seven cases both for mothers and five for fathers and seven cases for student activists.

Table 3: Political preference of parents and activists

	CPDM	SDF	Other opposition party	Unnamed party	No preference	"Apolitical"	Total
Mothers	6	0	3	2	7	0	18
Fathers	12	1	0	0	5	0	18
Activists	8	1	5	0	7	1	22
Total	26	2	8	2	8	1	

Source: Life stories. SDF = Social Democratic Front (presented as the main opposition party since 90's)

Among the eighteen cases with information about political preferences of activists and their parents, eleven reproduced the same preference as at least one of his parents. Among them and at the moment of the life story, eight were institutional activists with seven preferring the party in power and one having no preference. Two syncretic leaders prefer also the party in power whereas one autonomous prefer an opposition party. Syncretic leaders are student leaders simultaneously involved in both types of student associations (ISA and ASA), rare cases (4 cases other 70 life stories) which make them felt schizophrenic but that does exist and that could foster democratization foster (Morillas, 2015).

In contrary, among the seven activists who have a different political preference than their parents, a majority, four, are autonomous. They all prefer an opposition party (UPC, Manidem, SDF and RDMC) whereas their parents have no preference (three cases) or prefer CPDM (one case). Two are syncretic: one calls himself "apolitical" whereas his father was an active member of the SDF, the other one is closer to the opposition whereas his parents are close to the power. One is institutional: whereas her parents are active members of the CPDM, she doesn't express a political preference. So autonomous activists are more likely to make different political choices than their parents.

If we look at religion believes, autonomous are also comparatively more numerous to differ from their parents than institutional activist, even if most of autonomous activists reproduce the same religion as their parents. We collected 35 answers about activists and their parents. 28 have the same religion (15 institutional activists, 11 autonomous and 2 syncretic) and 7 have a different religion (4 autonomous, 2 syncretic and 1 institutional). So here again, compared with institutional and syncretic activists, autonomous ones are more likely to make different choices than their parents.

The six student activists who are engaged in the CPDM or in a subsidiary organization - President Biya's Youth (Presby) or the Youth Organization of the CPDM (OYCPDM) - are all AEI activists (table 4). Through his family close to power and through its associative socialization in an ISA, Eric believes that the party in power is the best able to ensure the future of the country. After joining the university in 2000, Éric voted for the first time in the 2011 presidential election. After having followed the programs and meetings of several candidates, he finally chose to vote for Paul Biya not because results of his policy - he finds the benefits unequally distributed - but by "realism. [...] I did not vote for an individual but for a program of society even if without insurance that realizable but I found it more enticing than the others ". He believes that Cameroon is a democratic country where everyone has the right to choose his party but is sorry that all Cameroonians do not take advantage of the wealth of the country, including his family. Originally from Sangmélima, a city near the birthplace of the President of the Republic, he thinks his family should benefit from this proximity.

Table 4: Type of activist engagement and political choice

	CPDM or Presby ou OYCPDM	SDF	Other opposition party	Total
ISA	6	0	1	7
ASA	0	0	1	1
ISA>ASA	0	1	2	3
ASA>ISA	0	0	0	0
Total	6	1	4	11

Source: Life stories

Thus, beyond the political, ethno-regional and economic divides - instumentalized by university authorities as well as by student activists and leaders - and in line with the work of Alain Marie, dynamics of individualization concern the two kind of student associations. But it seems to structure more strongly autonomous student activism. It means that we have to look case by case to assess if individualization process challenges the durability of the authoritarian situation in Cameroon. Let's look now at relationship to gender assignments.

3.2 Relationship to Gender Assignments

3.2.1 Male Domination in Public Cameroonian Universities

In her dissertation on women entrepreneurs in politics, Ginette Patience Nkolo Asse marries Sosso observes that "the Cameroonian political society is a vehicle for the relations of domination at work in society and built by the patriarchal system" (Nkolo Asse épouse Sosso 2015). Similarly, Luc Sindjoun previously wrote that "political institutions are the ground on which the traditional sharing of roles that confines women in the domestic sphere is most clearly manifested and men reserve the public space and the positions of political leadership" (Sindjoun 2000). Cameroon is not spared by male domination. In a survey about young people and politics in Cameroon, the authors explain that the smallest number of female respondents (295 women and 358 men) "is due to the lack of interest or the lack of openness of women to political discussion, not useful according to them"(Eboussi Boulaga, Nkolo Ayissi, and GrP Agages 2011).

The under-representation of women in Cameroonian university institutions is historically rooted (Bella 2015). The marginalization of women from schooling dates back to the colonial period. Between 1923 and 1957, women represented between 5% and 30% of the school enrolment (Ndengue 2018?). The transition to multiparty politics has seen the creation of public universities and favoured the presence of women. Between 1999 and 2011, the number of female students in public universities increased from 23 103 to 82 253 and the number of female teachers increased from 242 to 617. Nevertheless, in terms of percentage, the evolution is weaker for female students, from 38% to 40% of students. It has increased more for women teachers, from 14% to 19% (see table 5).

Table 5: Evolution of the number and proportion of female students and teachers between 1999 and 2011

		Students	Teachers
1999	Number of Women	23103	242
	Total Workforce	60544	1792
	Pourcentage of Women	38%	14%
2011	Number of Women	82253	617
	Total Workforce	207887	3167
	Pourcentage of Women	40%	19%

Source: Table carried out by our care on the data supplied by Achille Bella, 2015.

What about the place of women in the different type of student organizations?

3.2.2 Under-representation and Relegation of Women in the Leadership of Autonomous and Institutional Student Organizations

We could expect women to be numerous in student leadership since women are victims of particular oppression such as sexual harassment (Ekambi 2003; Mintoogue 2008; Pondi 2011). However, as elsewhere in the world, they are ultra-minority and, for those present, in positions of subordinate power because of patriarchy and intersectionality. Analysing how gender and ethnicity intersects (Crenshaw 1993)[4] in the constitution of student leadership help us to understand how patriarchism is reproduced and challenged in Cameroon.

Inside the two types of student associations we observe the low presence of women in leadership positions. In consequence, among our 70 life stories analysed, we have only 5 women. In the Uneec, an ASA in universities of Dschang and Douala, Paul Igor Tchebonsou, its founding president, remembers two cases: Houma Ayena, one of the vice-presidents of the first office and Apisay Ayafor Evelyne, treasurer, the latter position being typical of women even within political parties "where they are found massively at the bottom of the scale and are in the minority at the decision-making level" (Nkolo Asse épouse Sosso 2015, 111). Tchebonsou is the only male student leader who spontaneously evoked women's career in student activism: "Women generally choose another destiny either to leave or to marry" (life story with Paul Igor Tchebonsou, 9 August 2011, Yaoundé). This attitude could be explained by a favourable predisposition he claims to have towards women: "I have a lot of concern for balances, especially of gender, I am convinced that, by working, women are more productive that men, on the intellectual level, in terms of giving themselves, of reliability too". This predisposition seems to be related to the fact that he frequents regularly since the 1990s Henriette Ekwé, an activist of an anticolonial student union of the diaspora in the years 1950-1960, National Union of Kameroonian Students (*Unek*, Nkwengue 2006). She was also a member of the nationalist political party, UPC.

On the side of institutional student organizations, Leka quotes "*le*" (the masculine "the" in French, the feminine term is "*la*") secretary general from the board of directors of Musec and Penda, vice-president of the provisional office, which together with Leka is one of the six heads of Musec who benefited from a one-week trip to Paris in 2000 with the actors of the National Mutual School of French Students (MNEF) funded by the Ministry of Higher

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[4] Moreover, since we, national and international social scientists of all continents, are used to think a mainly with male white thinkers who have worked on their own socio-political environment (by "objectivity"), thinking through eyes and spirits of black feminists and black experiences, by showing us new aspects of our realities, could only be powerful.

Education. Leka also cites Majorettes President, Mireille Menyeng Balbine, as an example of female leaders on the UYI campus.

In other interviews some female activists were cited. Two of them seem to have been used by the administration to prevent the expression of possible claims. Theophile and Eric cite a vice-president of the Aefas of UYI who, after the departure of the president, was appointed by the dean of the faculty of science to succeed him, thus keeping for five years the position of presidency, until the April 2005 national student strike, which appears to have contributed to the renewal of student leadership in this ISA. Another student, was president of a science club. Contrary to an agreement that had been concluded between the AE chairs providing for a rotating representation of students on the university's board of directors, she was chosen by the rector of the UYI every year between 2005 and 2008, refusing to give the leaders of the Aefas the reports of activity. It seems that between them and the university authorities was negotiated this *status quo*: retention of a students, and here women, on the board of directors or at the head of a student organization in exchange for an activity of representation that satisfies the university authorities.

We don't have example of collective forms of individualization towards gender since the nomination of women is more a strategy than a political will to empower women. Few women appear to be elected and, on all public Cameroonian campus, there have never been any student organizations claiming to be feminists (online communication with Rose Ndengue, 28 March 2018). It's for their skills than some women have been elected at leadership position. Of the five activists I interviewed, three were elected on the basis of their skills: the two presidents of the International Junior Chamber at UB and the founding President of the Human Rights Club of the university of Dschang. Gaëlle, who became a member of the UD's board of directors, has been put at the top of the student electoral list by the previous male student member of the Board in order to satisfy not the gender but the regional balance (the ten regions of Cameroon must be represented in the student electoral list of all institutional student organization, process of political socialization of students institutional leaders which contribute to the reproduction of dominant rules of the political game).

And Marie-Cathy Bitang seems to have been appointed as Addec's secretary of communication for a woman to be a member of the expanded office of Addec. During her life story, Bitang expresses very definite positions on the place that women must have within the Addec and, more generally, within society which are in contradiction with common assignments which make me say she's engages in a process of individualization. In her case, this process contributes to challenge patriarchy inside Addec. Indeed, she emphasizes a contradiction within the Addec: "How do you want women to participate in learned things when they are asked to cook all the time?" I also observed that when the Addec organizes festivities, women, activists or family members of an activist, are contacted to cook. This is particularly the case of the No. 1 censor of the 4th Addec office, Theodora Balimhag. Men are involved in the choice of dishes, budgeting and financing. They also intervene for more specific tasks: transporting food, filling sandwiches and dishes. If Bitang refuses to spend hours cooking for Addec activities, the other three female activists I met regularly in the Addec do. Bitang complains regularly to male activists of Addec asking why they are accommodating, while women are poorly represented in the Addec. They answer her, she says, denigrating her question: "Ah, you often like to criticize too much" (life story with Bitang, 16 August 2011, Yaoundé).

More generally, Jacques Ion observes a fairly similar dynamic of individualization in France: "There are more individuals, particularly among young people and especially women, to associate, to mobilize, to intervene in the public space. But they do it according to new modalities, which deviate significantly from the patterns of militancy of yesteryear. More

autonomous in relation to their home environment, more anxious to make their own speech heard, more reflexive, freed from all obligatory reverence towards the powerful and the experts, these new activists sometimes confuse people" (Ion 2012).

3.2.3 Explanations

The small number of women among student activists is explained by "the weight of gender hierarchies in the development [...] of social and political mobilizations"(Roux and Fillieule 2009, 12) that materializes in the relegation of women behind the scenes and their absence in society. history of these mobilizations. And in the case of Cameroon, these hierarchies were reinforced during the colonial period, which instituted representations leading to the transformation of women into "minor and apolitical subjects" (Nkolo Asse épouse Sosso 2015, 71). In local societies where women had access to the political scene, colonization ignored them and, in doing so, transformed the modes of legitimizing political participation (Ngoa Tabi 1968).

In the post-colonial period, the same disincentives peculiar to feminist militancy as those observed by Pascal Bianchini et Gabin Korbéogo in Burkina Faso apply to Cameroon: the cost of political commitment as well as specific benefits women would receive: "They would be less solicited by family economic demand, and have recourse possibilities arising from the forms of conjugality in which they are engaged (relationships of cronyism, betrothal, weddings, etc.)" (Bianchini and Korbéogo 2008).

The cost of activist engagement includes the fear of police repression and the risk of family rejection. On this last point, one of our interviewees, president of a club at the UDs, testifies as follows: "The family said that at the university you do not have to integrate into the clubs, it's the sects all that, so when I came here the first year, I said to myself 'I do not have to throw myself into these things because I may be putting my hands where I should not and it can get me into trouble'. I was initially reluctant" (life story, 7 June 2012, Dschang).

This case shows that the family is reluctant to face groupings considered obscure, esoteric and power and that student associations, even institutional, can be considered by students as sectarians. This is not unique to female students since male activists also shared a similar interpretation with respect to family reluctance on sects. Going back to gender, another activist, student representative on the Board of the UD, explains the fact that "girls in general are not very interested in that [...] because they think it's boys' stuff" (life story, 28 June 2012, Douala). Two presidents of a Student branch in the university of Buea of the Junior Chamber International (JCI, Young International Chamber, the one in office and the previous one), Beetle and Bancu, interviewed simultaneously, stress the importance of understanding their spouse and the weight of family constraints:

> « *Cindy: And there are a lot of women inside JCI organization?*
>
> *Former president of JCI: Yes, there are a lot of women. But you know as you go up the ladder, as you get old some women fall back because maybe family, you have to get married. You have to start having children and like the difficulty most women complain of, most men say I cannot be in my house and my wife is going for a conference in the US where she is going to be alone with other men and…women drop a little from time to time. Except when your husband really understands. Yes, if you have a husband who understands yes.*
>
> *Cindy: So, you for instance you have a boyfriend, he accepts it or?*
>
> *Former president of JCI: Yes. He accepts though sometimes it's difficult but they don't understand. You go for a project 11 pm 'where are you? I'm in a JCI meeting. Wonderful!' sometimes it is difficult but we… yeah he understands.*
>
> *Cindy: For you too?*

Current president of JCI: Yeah. That is the same thing. Okay you are asking about my relationship and JCI? Sometimes they would want to understand but when you would graduate it becomes…they would not want to take it anymore. Especially like when I told you my timetable. You have to realize that there is absolutely little or no time I spend with my boyfriend. In short, very little time. Only when I'm going to bed, I get to see him. So sometimes he tries to understand that I'm trying to do what I want to do and then try to set the pace for my own future career. But sometimes he might not understand.

Cindy: What is the percentage of women inside JCI members?

Current president of JCI: From my board, I think I have more men than women. For instance, if I want to approximate I'd say I have a 70 percent men and 30 percent women. But my women are very active.

Cindy: And women are president of JCI.

Current president of JCI: Women need a lot of encouragement to take leadership position. Some women just shy away because they think that it is a man's stuff. So, we need to work a lot on women empowerment »[5].

Conclusion

Contemporary student leaders (1996-2014) are engaged in individualization processes. We have seen that they develop their own tactics within student association, reproducing or challenging the rules of the game of the authoritarian situation. Some of them distance themselves from their primary socialization at the political and ethnoregional level, in particular inside autonomous association and in a much more marked way in the contemporaneous Addec than the previous student leaders of the Parliament of the 1990's. These militant student commitments and the processes of individualization that characterize them have effects at the micrologic and macrological levels (Sawicki and Siméant 2010), which generally occur along the divide between "autonomous" and "institutional".

At the individual level, student activists are, during their militant career (Agrikoliansky 2001), the object of political socialization. The negotiations with the university authorities bring all the students to know and to appropriate the rules of the game in force in the university field. However, they do not make all the same use of it. They rather carry out differentiated practices. Autonomous student activists are generally much more critical and strive to reach uncompromised negotiations for the authorities to respect the commitments made to improve living conditions and studies. Institutional student activists give way more quickly to pressures, thus making more compromises, for fear of being dismissed or stigmatized by the authorities and to suffer biographical consequences that could harm their professional projects.

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[5] Entretien, 9 mai 2012, Buea.

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